

## MARKETING

# Dave & Bubba's wine promo offers fun, sun and profits

by Jack Hayes

PALM HARBOR, Fla. — Dave & Bubba's here is reaping the jolt of competition and the slowdown of Florida's unpredictable summer season by discounting wines on a special basis at \$1 a bottle over invoice.

The 150-seat Americana-themed cafe, operating on Tampa Bay's upscale Gulf Coast just north of Clearwater Beach, is driving double-digit sales increases with its summertime wine promotion, which also features four microbrew beers at a tempting 35 cents above cost.

"Our numbers are 30 percent ahead of last year's because customers are talking us up," said Patrick Grey, partner in the \$1.2 million casual operation, which has weathered the influx of eight new dinner houses since its debut two and a half years ago.

Grey attributed at least half of his restaurant's increased sales to the wine promotion, which enters its sixth month in July. The 10 wines on Dave & Bubba's most recent promotional

menu ranged in price from \$5.50 to \$9.95. One bottle was less than \$6; seven were \$7 or less; and two were under \$5.

"Customers are saying, 'Maybe I've never heard of this label, but for \$6.50 I'll try it.' The results are unbelievable," Grey remarked. "We're catching a new wave of guests. It's all word-of-mouth growth."

Calling his revenue shrinkage on the dollar-over-cost effort a "customer-friendly" advertising expense, Grey, who spends nothing on print, radio or TV claims his cost per new customer is therefore less than what it would be if he'd used traditional advertising.

"Considering I'd spend \$150 to reach 30 new people with any reasonable ad, my cost of acquisition comes to \$5 a customer," said Grey, a former catalog writer and later marketing vice president with a Dallas-based Home Shopping Network subsidiary. He also spent a decade in Manhattan as a maître d' and dining room



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— Patrick Grey  
Dave & Bubba's

captain at The Waldorf Astoria and The Rainbow Room.

"I'm just transferring my acquisition cost to those bottles of wine," added Grey, whose partner, Dave Son-

dragger, operated two restaurants previously in Annapolis, Md.

Grey said that patrons are so delighted with their savings on the wine they invariably order more expensive entrees and larger selection of appetizers and desserts. Many customers who had previously bought one bottle of wine and sipped it through the entire evening are now buying two bottles. "It's a marketing decision that we're trying," Grey said.

Each week Grey creates a new value selection — buying five cases each of the 10 chosen wines — his goal being to sell out before the next cycle begins.

Describing a typical night during the last week of May, Grey said a seat of the dining room revealed that 17 of his restaurant's 20 tables had bottles of wine. On average, he said 65 percent of Dave & Bubba's dining parties are ordering wine.

"Wines should add greatly to your meal, not

your bill," reads the subtitle of a typical Dave & Bubba's dollar-above-cost menu.

Some discounted bottles and prices appearing recently include a McWilliams Chardonnay, \$6.50; Montecarlo Vineyard Pinot Noir, \$5.75; Glen Ellen Merlot, \$6.50; George de Bousf Chardonnay at \$6.92; and Fortini de France Cabernet Sauvignon, \$6.99. The list includes nearly as many imports as domestic bottles.

Projecting what Grey calls "a Greenwich Village ambience that's been warm, if embraced by the locals," Dave & Bubba's is averaging about \$16 per-person at dinner. He noted that the establishment also has launched a successful push into "classic cocktails." Meanwhile, the back bar is stocked with 40 cocktails, 30 bourbons, 18 vodkas, Cognacs, brandies and Armagnacs and 13 ports by the glass.

"No matter how good your product is, if you don't get it sold, you haven't got it sold," Grey concluded.

## AD WATCH



## Olympic ambush

The Florida Division of Tourism has agreed to cut short a major "Summer Games" campaign promoting the amenities of the Sunshine State to thousands of Atlanta's Olympic visitors. Carried on 40 billboards in the Atlanta market, the "ambush" advertising effort angered Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games officials, who called it a legal violation.

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## MARKETING DIGESTS

### Domino's is hot and wow over buying deal

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Harassing local media buying power from four different agencies and paying the \$33 million to acquire in the hands of national agency J. Walter Thompson, expected to save Domino's Pizza "a tremendous amount of money in administrative costs," said spokesman Tim McIntyre about the chain's spot buying consolidation plan, which will take effect Aug. 1.

JWT will produce 10-second tags for the company's local promotional programs but is not expected to assume any creative responsibilities, which are currently handled by its long-time agency of record, Grey Advertising. Grey installed a new creative team for the account earlier this year in an effort to keep the pizza account, and the strategy seems to be working.

### Morrison freshens image with ad campaign

ATLANTA — After 76 years in business and a corporate spin-off that was finalized in March, Morrison's Fresh Cooking Inc. is bringing itself into the 1990s with a repositioning strategy.

The multistep effort includes new menu items including steamed vegetables and beef and chicken skewers as well as television, radio, print and in-store promotion, supporting the "Anything You Want Restaurant" tag. An original menu with Zesty Cajun influence underscores the 150-unit canteen chain's Southern roots.

"We offer customers great value, variety and fresh, home-cooked food," said Sue Harwell, vice president of marketing. "The spots are intended to reach a broader audience."

### Time, fare latest Italian lunchtime message

As The Olive Garden completes the nationwide rollout of its "Pronto" menu systemwide today, Prime Restaurant Group already has introduced "Lunch in a New York Minute" throughout its 30 East Side Mario's locations in Chicago.

"We are trying to attract consumers with the idea that instead of fast food or family dining, come and look at us because we have capabilities to deliver better-quality food and service in lunch," said Rosebudino, a Prime spokesman.

Currently, East Side Mario's tallies about 35 percent of sales from lunch. New menu items, including linguine chicken piccata and garlic mushroom rigatoni, have been introduced "to imply that you can do lunch quickly at East Side Mario's," Rosebudino added.

The Olive Garden, meanwhile, is introducing its "Pronto" lunch program, also devoted to lower-labor-hour sales. Menu items include Tuscan grilled chicken salad, Italian club, turkey and provolone, and an Italian meatball sandwich. "We're excited about the new flavor profile, this is a much more energetic and exciting menu," said spokesman Rick Walsh.